



Kamelia in her award-winning garden in London

ISLAM BLOSSOMS ABROAD

The Emirates' first landscape architect to grace the prestigious RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Kamelia Bin Zaal, creates an award-winning garden

Words by PRATYUSH SARUP

Carved into a majestic white marble water wall, scripture from the *Holy Qu'ran*, Surah Sad: Verse 50 – ‘The gates of the Garden of Eden will open up to them’ – greets visitors to Kamelia’s serene garden, The Beauty of Islam, which won London’s RHS Chelsea Flower Show’s esteemed Silver Gilt award in May. The mix of poetry, calligraphy, indigenous Gulf fauna and textures gave those strolling through the opportunity to explore the relationship between Mother Nature and humankind, which is prominent in Islamic culture.

This is the first time an Emirati has been invited to showcase their work at the exclusive show, since its inception in 1913. Back in Dubai, Kamelia has an impressive landscaping portfolio, one that encourages verdant beauty to grow in the harsh desertscape of the UAE. As well as being



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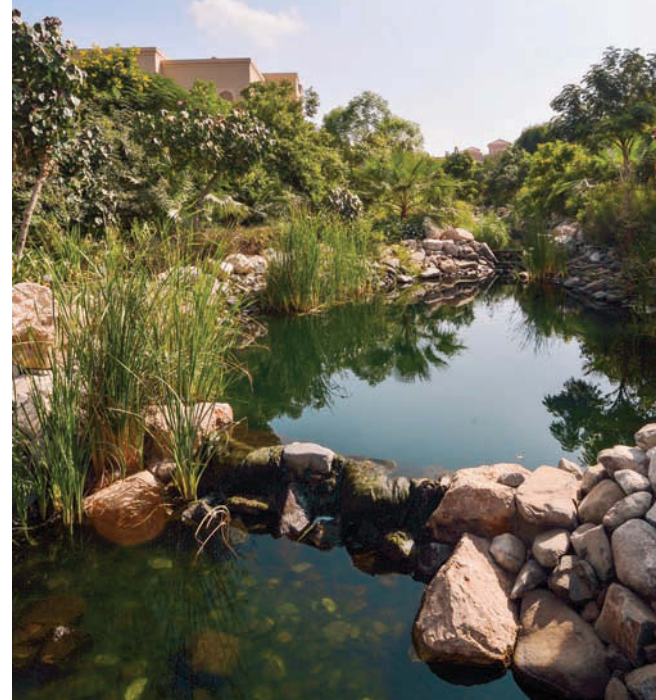
Kamelia Bin Zaal, landscape architect

the creative director at Al Barari, her father’s visionary eco-friendly residential development and sponsor of her latest horticultural endeavour, she is the founder of Second Nature, which has led to her designing the landscapes of many luxurious properties, including those on Nurai Island, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai’s Palm Jumeirah.

“I wanted to create a space that would have a positive impact on people’s perception of Islam,” she says. “More importantly, it was the chance to show the world that Islam and Arabic culture share the same values and morals as other religions and cultures.” Designed to take you on a



MOVING IN
There were 15 entrants to the 'Show garden' category at the Royal Horticultural Society event. Gold was awarded to The Laurent-Perrier Chatsworth Garden designed by Brit Dan Pearson. The garden represents a beautiful segment of the sprawling 105-acre Chatsworth Garden, the estate of the duke and duchess of Devonshire.



culture and Islam. A magnificent stainless steel sculpture that reads 'Ullah' anoints the central water feature while a hand-picked selection of flora native to the Arabian Peninsula – including orange citrus, lavender, papyrus, and Kamelia's favourite, the *Bismarckia nobilis* – play on shade and light conventionally found in Islamic gardens, evoking a sense of serene refuge.

Discussing her vocation, Kamelia tips her hat to her father, Zaal Mohammed Zaal, who encouraged her love for nature. "I grew up watching my father working in the garden," says the designer. "He has always loved flowers and the sense of peace a little patch of green can give. Discussing the conceptual planning of Al Barari in the early 2000s inspired me to enrol at the Inchbald School of Design in London to study garden design in 2003."

Back to her drawing board in Dubai, she is busy putting the finishing touches to the landscape designs for phase two of the forward-thinking development, known locally as the eco billionaire's row. "I'm planning to recreate The Beauty of Islam in this secondary phase," she reveals. "I would love to give people here a space of calm and beauty, somewhere they can find a contemplative moment or two." ■

contemporary, atmospheric voyage across the Arabic spice route, The Beauty of Islam is an ode to His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the late President of the UAE, and his love for nature and his people. Carved into marble and beautifully set against the sombre green of an olive hedge, the poem *Flock of Meanings* – penned by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, deputy prime minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, in honour of His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan – runs across the length of the garden.

"The ancient Spice Route of the Arabic empire finds its way through the mélange of scents and colours," she explains. "Fig and citrus trees punctuate the design with bewitching intensity, while a haze of scents emanating from the ginger, rosemary, coffee and cardamom plants represent the rich diversity of horticulture from our region."

Breaking away from the traditional Islamic courtyard quadrant, Kamelia set her layout at a 45-degree angle, incorporating classical Islamic iconography, such as the eight-point star, the Khatim, in both modern and traditional materials originating from countries touched by Arab



A verdant Mediterranean-themed garden Kamelia designed for Al Barari